

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001133

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2006

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [NI](#) [ASEC](#)

SUBJECT: KANO HOTEL BURNED BY SHARI'A ENFORCERS

REF: (A) ABUJA 762 (B) ABUJA 358

Classified by Charge Tim Andrews for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a recent crackdown, the Government of Kano State authorized the quasi-vigilante enforcement of the State's new liquor law by sending the Deputy Governor, accompanied by Hisbah members (Shari'a enforcers) to five hotels to enforce a ban on the sale or purchase of alcohol by Muslims. Some of the Hisbah became aggressive and broke liquor bottles, then burned an Igbo hotel two nights later. This action appears to have been an attempt by Governor Kwankwaso to deflect criticism from Muslim leaders that the State was not serious in its efforts to enforce Shari'a. Over 90 percent of Kwankwaso's constituents are Muslim, and while many are concerned about Shari'a implementation, none feel free to openly criticize it. Unfortunately, this action has increased insecurity among the Igbo and Yoruba communities in Kano, while unofficially sanctioning vigilante action by Muslims. The Governor assured Poloff that the perpetrators of the arson have been arrested, and held without bail. He claimed they could not be brought to trial without causing further protest by Muslims, and potential unrest. Governor Kwankwaso stopped short of admitting it, but his control of Kano State appears to be steadily eroding. End Summary.

Enforcing Shari'a

12. (C) During a two-day trip to Kano May 11 and 12, Poloff met with law enforcement, religious, civil society and Government leaders to verify reports of recent Hisbah enforcement activities. Nigerian media reported last month that Deputy Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje led a group of Hisbah Shari'a enforcers and Nigerian Police to five of Kano's biggest hotels on April 14 to "order" them not to sell alcohol. During the raids, Hisbah enforcers broke liquor and beer bottles and engaged in minor vandalism. Two days later, some Hisbah youths came back and burned down the Henzino Hotel, a prominent Igbo/Yoruba social gathering place. Contrary to published reports, Deputy Commissioner of Police Ezozue was not involved in any of these incidents. He said the Deputy Governor had not informed him or the Commissioner prior to the raids on the hotels, and commented on the "dangerous" precedent set by this action.

Background

13. (C) There are currently two groups of Hisbah enforcers in Kano. The official group, created in November, 2000, is led by Sheikh Abubakar Ameen Al-Deen, reports to the Police and co-ordinates its activities with the State Government. Several months after the largely ceremonial "launching" of Shari'a last June, some Kano Muslims, impatient with the Government's inaction, created their own independent Shari'a enforcement organization unaffiliated with State Government. These groups overlap somewhat, but the Governor claims that the unofficial Shari'a enforcers were responsible for the property damage to the hotels, and for the arson. On April 7, Kano's Independent Shari'a Committee, a group of Ulama who are critical of the Governor's handling of Shari'a, gave Kano authorities a one-week ultimatum to order hotels to stop selling alcohol. In response, Governor Kwankwaso said that he ordered Deputy Governor Ganduje to make a symbolic demonstration against the hotels and order them to stop selling alcohol. While State-sanctioned Hisbah enforcers and a few police from the Government House guard-force accompanied Ganduje, several rowdies from the independent Hisbah took advantage of the opportunity to wreak havoc. Fortunately, only liquor stocks were damaged on the 14th.

14. (C) Governor Kwankwaso said that a group of the Independent Hisbah returned on the 16th and burned the Henzino Hotel. He said the Hotel was located in a Muslim

residential neighborhood, and that there had been a long history of conflicts with the neighbors, largely because the Hotel was a large commercial establishment, surrounded by a Hausa residential neighborhood. He reported that his intelligence on the incident indicated that some of the Hotel's neighbors contacted the unofficial Hisbah, and asked them to burn the Hotel. The Governor said that he was "gravely concerned" about the hotel-burning, and that six of the perpetrators had been arrested. He confided that they were being held by police without bail, but could not be brought to trial at this time because of the potential for protests by other Hisbah members and Shari'a supporters.

15. (C) Poloff observed that the new modus operandi for hotels is that no liquor or beer bottles are left on the tables. Most nightclubs have closed, and the beer parlors in Sabon Gari, the predominantly Christian/Southern neighborhood of roughly 500,000 inhabitants, are being more discreet. Kwankwaso said that the Government has no intention of prohibiting alcohol sale or consumption by Christians, as long as it is done with "discretion." The unofficial policy is now that alcohol may be served as long as bottles or cans are not readily visible. The Central Hotel, traditionally one of Kano's busiest night-club venues, was nearly deserted on a Friday night. The burning of the Henzino has made other Kano hoteliers understandably nervous, and they are now reluctant to risk serving alcohol openly.

16. Comment: Most people in Kano view this action as a political move by the Deputy Governor to position himself for the PDP gubernatorial nomination in 2003. Ganduje has in fact become much more popular than the Governor following the raids, and his Abubakar Rimi-led faction of the PDP may succeed in wresting the PDP nomination from Kwankwaso. Kwankwaso is accurately viewed by his constituents as reluctant to enforce Sharia, and his popularity has suffered. It was not surprising, however, that Kwankwaso claimed to have organized the D.G.'s outing in order to "do something" to appease Shari'a supporters. Aminu Wali, the President's liaison to the National Assembly and a Kano political brahmin with a profound knowledge of the intricacies of its politics, confirmed to us that both Kwankwaso and the D.G. knew in advance of the "raids." In any event, Kwankwaso would not be able to publicly criticize or reprimand his Deputy. Enforcing the State's drinking laws through the Hisbah rather than the National Police sets the rather unfortunate precedent that Kano State permits vigilante Shari'a enforcement. Given the fact that one hotel was burned immediately after the raids, this policy may be very difficult for civil authorities to reverse.

17. (U) Comment Continued: This incident has added significantly to the existing tensions in Kano between Northern and Southern ethnic groups. Southerners took note of the fact that the one hotel that was burned belonged to an Igbo, and served as a central social meeting-place for Igbo and Yoruba. However, the fact that alcohol is still available under the rather transparent "cover" of cups but no bottles means that even ardent Shari'a enforcers still have their limits. Post will follow with a broader analysis of Shari'a and the security situation in Kano septel.

Andrews